Heart TO Art!

THE RAJENDRA-RAFI RISHTA!

As far as Rajendra Kumar was concerned, Mohammed Rafi was the medium through which he bared his soul to the world and also crooned to his on-screen beloved. Over a period of almost 25 years, the jubilee star must have vocalized over 80 hits, and Mohammed Rafi, that singer incomparable, cornered a whopping 75 per cent plus of them. He sang under the baton of composers as varied as Shanker-Jaikishan, Naushad, Ravi, Vasant Desai, S. D. Burman, Kalyanji-Anandji and Laxmikant-Pyarelal, to name a few.

Admittedly, the late Mohammed Rafi was also associated as the prime **awaaz** of a dozen heroes and even a few comedians. But did the Rafi-Rajendra **rishta** stand out?

You bet it did!

Gentle and genteel. That was the essence of the Jubilee Kumar's star image. His USP? That instant appeal of a perfect gentlemanly lover, who often faced earthquakes in his romantic terrain. When happy, he would be energetic, complete with flailing arms and intoxicatingly naughty looks. When miserable, he would retain his sobriety and suffer inwardly, those passionate eyes filled with indefinable and suppressed sorrows.

He reflected the fast changing mores of Hindi cinema at its turning point, from the greater realism of the '50s to the escapism of the '60s. Rajendra Kumar emerged as a major force at the time when Hindi cinema was fast divorcing itself from the traumatic idealism and bitter frustrations spawned by Partition and the ground realities of neo-Independence. The mood was escapist and the audience

was in no mood to watch their real-life blues being mirrored in films. Cinema was seen as the great escape. Films as well as their music gradually became fluffier, less staid and more glossy.

Music directors began to look to the West, even while retaining Indian melody as their base. They began to make delicious experiments with the limitless range and flexibility of Rafi's voice. At one end remained the Rafi of Dilip Kumar, Guru Dutt and Bharat Bhushan. But at the other extreme lay the Rafi of Shammi Kapoor.

And Rajendra Kumar became the centrepoint, at the equidistant position in this vocal Rafi pendulum. He had the handsome, trendy look of the '60s, yet had his inspirational roots in the Dilip Kumar-esque persona. Thus he combined the best of both worlds and music directors found it easy to be inspired by his screen image, because they could judiciously blend the best of the old and the new.

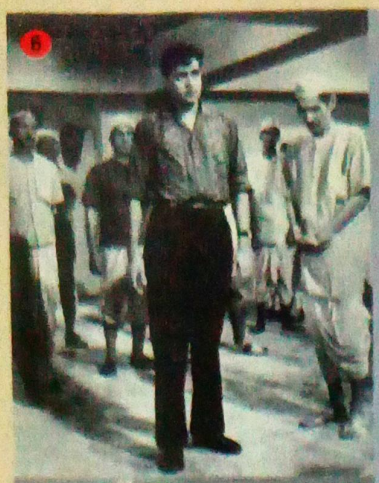
Even a diehard traditionalist like Naushad had to tread a middle path for this star. The brilliant score of **Mere Mehboob** may be rooted in **raags**, but '**Ae husn zara jaag**', '**Yaad mein teri jaag jaag ke hum**' and '**Mere mehboob tujhe meri muhabbat ki kasam**', were remarkably fresh for someone with Naushad's classical approach. When later, Naushad retreated into an older mode with **Palki**, the results were nowhere as good and when he went the whole hog towards modern populism in Rajendra Kumar's home production **Ganwaar**, the maestro was decidedly uncomfortable.

But probably the only Rafi-Rajendra collaboration to have a really old-world feel was Vasant Desai's **Goonj Uthi Shehnai**, probably the first Rafi-Rajendra team-up of any consequence. Desai was too classical a composer to turn over a modern leaf and he designed quintessential but perennial '50s numbers like, '**Jeevan mein piya tera saath rahe**' and the superb, '**Keh do koi na kare yahan pyar**', for the hero.

Ravi, then on a high, pitched in with a few delights like, '**Tumhein paake humne jahan paa liya hai**' (**Gehra Daag**) and '**Jabse tumhein dekha hai**' (**Gharana**). But if Rafi became soul to Rajendra Kumar's body, it was largely because of music directors Shanker-Jaikishan, who decisively ruled in the first decade of Rajendra Kumar's stardom.

1 – *With Sadhana in Aap Aaye Bahaar Aayee.* 2 – *Aas Ka Panchhi.* 3 – *With Nazima in Anjana.* 4 – *With Raj Kapoor and Vyjayanthimala in Sangam.* 5 – *With Sadhana in Arzoo.*

The cascade of hits S-J gave for Rajendra Kumar, began with **Aas Ka Panchhi** ('60) in which they had Mukesh and Subir Sen as his playback voice, along with Rafi. Never again after this film did they even venture to sideline Rafi for Mr. Silver Jubilee. No one came in to share the spoils either. But for Mahendra Kapoor in a **Sangam** song it was Rafi all the stunningly **sureela** way right up to their last, rather inconsequential film together in 1972, **Aan Baan**. And S-J established a Rajendra Kumar-Rafi leitmotif, not only all on their own but also set the pattern for Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Kalyanji-Anandji with Kumar when their own magic began to wane in the early '70s. But in that one terrific decade, S-J unleashed gem after priceless gem and the legion of memorable songs included, '**Tum kamsin ho**' and '**O sanam tere ho gaye hum**' (**Aayee Milan Ki Bela**), '**Chhed mere hamrahi**' and '**Woh din yaad karo**' (**Hamrahi**), '**Dil ek mandir hai**' and '**Yaad na jaaye beete dinon ki**' (**Dil Ek Mandir**),



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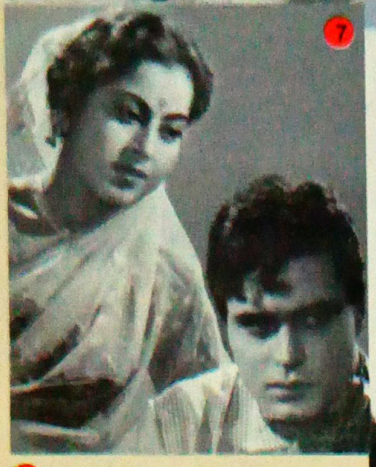

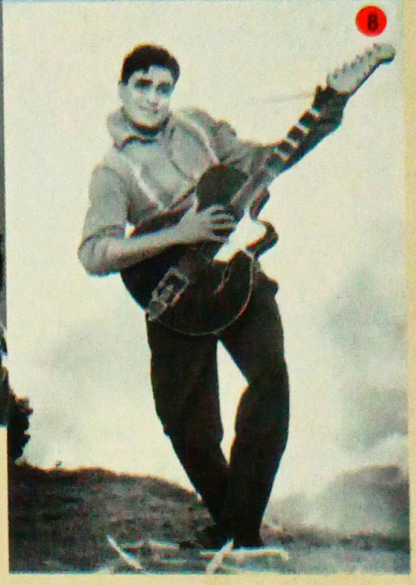

6 – *Sasural.*

7 – ***With Anita Guha in** Goonj Uthi Shehnai.*

8 – *Hamrahi.*

'**Teri pyari pyari soorat ko**' (**Sasural**), '**Pehle mile the sapnon mein**' and '**Ghungharwaa mora chham chaam baaje**' (**Zindagi**) and '**Yeh mera prem patra padh kar**' (**Sangam**). But these were only the earliest outpourings of the SJ-Rafi-Rajendra volcano. Streaming in later were hot numbers like '**Ae nargis-e-mastana**,' '**Aji humse bachkar**' and '**Ae phoolon ki rani**' (**Arzoo**), '**Baharon phool barsao**' and '**Kaise samjhaoon**' (**Suraj**), '**Aaj ki raat yeh kaisi raat**' (**Aman**), '**Kahan chal diye**', '**Kaun hai jo sapnon mein aaya**' and '**Sachcha hai gar pyar tera sanam**' (**Jhuk Gaya Aasmaan**) and finally '**Khuda bhi aasmaan se jab zameen par**' (**Dharti/1970**).

But even as the S-J baton began to finally buckle under the winds of change, the Rafi-Rajendra bond was to enjoy a high for a few more years. Rafi then was beseiged by Kishore Kumar's sudden glory that was engineered by the Burman duo of father and son. But the very same **Dada** (SD) Burman created two of the finest numbers Rafi sang for Rajendra Kumar in Burman's first and last film with the star — O.P. Ralhan's **Talaash** (1969). These two musical aces are '**Palkon ke peeche se**' and the exceptionally-rivetting, '**Aaj ko jhumli raat ma**.'

In 1969, the outstanding Rajendra Kumar musical was **Anjaana** from the **Aas Ka Panchhi — Aayee Milan Ki Bela — Aman** loyalist of the star, Mohan Kumar. Like most SJ-aficionados by then, Mohan Kumar had switched over to Laxmikant-Pyarelal, who were raring to go and prove themselves one up on their own idols (S-J). The result was a hit-studded score with Rafi's '**Rimjhim ke geet saawan gaaye**,' the classic, '**Ke jaan chali jaaye**,' the title song, '**Main raahi anjaan raahon ka**' and '**Meri muhabbat teri jawani**' all proving popular along with Mukesh's '**Woh kaun hain woh kaun hai**'.

In 1970, Kalyanji-Anandji also gave that enduring sixer '**Mere mitwaa mere meet re**' (**Geet**), following it up with, '**Bol mere saathiyan**' in the 1972 **Lalkar**. But in between, it was L-P who once again delivered a winner in the 1971 **Aap Aaye Bahaar Aayee**. The title track was a steal and the Rafi-Lata beauty, '**Mujhe teri muhabbat ka sahara mil gaya hota**' remains as poignant as ever, even after the passage of 28 years.

And yet, the end of the bond was in sight, as factors beyond control were in play. Rajendra Kumar was on a fade-out run, Rafi was still reeling under the Kishore onslaught and people's tastes in films and music had changed. As we entered the era of 'sittings' and hit-conscious film-makers, the sober romance of Rajendra Kumar found few takers. His own home productions **Tangewala** (which had just one Rafi song in a Mukesh-based mediocre Naushad score), **Gaon Hamara Shehar Tumhara**, **Do Jasoos**, **Sone Ka Dil Lohe Ke Haath**, were filled with music which was mediocre to say the least, and pathetic by Rajendra Kumar's past standards. By the time Rafi slammed back into reckoning in 1977, the Jubilee Kumar was shooting what was to be his last Silver Jubilee as a (senior, not solo) hero — **Saajan Bina Suhagan**. And here it was only Yesudas', '**Madhuban khushboo deta hai**' which made an impact, despite the Southern-accented voice sounding incongruous for the actor.

The Rafi-Rajendra bond, however, seemed to go deeper than the mere relationship between a singer and star. Their last film together was destined to have a popular number composed by Usha Khanna — '**Jiske liye sabko chhoda**' in the '81 **Saajan Ki Saheli**. And they were both destined to achieve immortality in the month of July, though years apart. While Rafi had gone to his Maker on July 31, '80, Rajendra Kumar followed 19 years later i.e. on July 12, '99. Finally, soul met soul!

— Dr. Rajiv Vijayakar